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SUBJECT: ACTION REQUEST: UNDEF ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR

REF: OSTERMEIER-NORIN EMAIL THURSDAY MARCH 20

Classified By: IO Acting DAS Grover Joseph Rees,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (SBU) This is an action request. Department requests Mission as soon as possible - and before the close of business on Thursday, March 27 - to demarche at an appropriately senior level to the office of the Secretary General and to UN Democracy Fund Executive Director Roland Rich to convey: a) that the U.S. has serious concerns with the potential appointment of Aye Aye Thant as the Chair of the UN Democracy Fund Advisory Board; b) the U.S. would like more time to consult with other Advisory Board members about this appointment and requests that the decision not be taken this Friday; and c) that the U.S. is again disappointed at not having been consulted before the Secretary General's preference to appoint Aye Aye Thant was announced at an expert-level meeting of all Advisory Board members. Mission may draw on suggested points provided below, as appropriate. Mission is also requested to quietly raise U.S. concerns with friendly governments, including but not limited to Japan and Australia, to see if they may have similar views.

Suggested Points:

¶12. (SBU) An initial survey into Aye Aye Thant's background suggests that she is at best equivocal about what posture democratic governments and multilateral institutions should take toward the military regime in Burma. See paragraph 6. The UN Democracy Fund Advisory Board should not be chaired by a national of a country governed by an egregiously undemocratic regime who remains on good terms with the regime and who has advocated positions favored by the regime. An appointment by the Secretary General of Aye Aye Thant as UNDEF Advisory Board Chair would send a terrible signal at a time when the United Nations needs to make clear that the Burmese government's apparent determination to impose its so-called "roadmap to democracy" by means of a sham election is unacceptable. Such an appointment could discredit the Fund and would likely draw serious questions from pro-democracy groups and institutions in donor countries, including but not limited to the United States Congress.

¶13. (SBU) The U.S. is UNDEF's largest contributor. We do not want to see U.S. support for the Fund jeopardized because of this appointment, or because of a lack of consultation generally with the U.S.

¶14. (SBU) The Advisory Board's terms of reference clearly state that the Board will select one of its members to be appointed as Chair by the Secretary General. It is not acceptable for UNDEF simply to name a preferred candidate without genuine deliberation and review among Board members. We urge you to allow the Advisory Board more time to consider the appointment of a new Chair.

¶15. (SBU) The U.S. is open to considering other candidates for

the position, and notes that Professor Michael Doyle of Columbia University has been ably serving as acting Advisory Board Chair for several months. We are currently reviewing the list of Advisory Board members to identify potential candidates who would be preferable to Aye Aye Thant.

Background:

¶ 6. (C) Aye Aye Thant holds a Myanmar passport; several experts familiar with the situation in Burma indicate that she has advocated leniency toward the current government and may have close ties to the regime. Aye Aye Thant has stated publicly that the West should not "isolate" the regime as this contributes to "greater resentment and misunderstanding" and essentially called for the U.S. to drop its sanctions by suggesting that her father, former UN Secretary General U Thant, would have insisted that "U.S. sanctions be lifted" (from a 2002 interview with the Asia Times). In 2003, Aye Aye Thant made a widely publicized visit to Burma as the guest of the government that was criticized by Burmese democracy advocates.

¶ 7. (SBU) The UNDEF Advisory Board is made up of 19 individuals, composed of 13 member states (Australia, France, Germany, India, Japan, Qatar, USA, Mali, Mozambique, Peru, Philippines, Romania and Vanuatu); three representatives of the Secretary General (Aye Aye Thant, President of the U Thant Institute; Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, Executive Secretary of the Council for the Development of Social

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Science in Africa; and Professor Michael Doyle, Columbia University); two representatives of non-governmental organizations (Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development; and Mr. Nicholas Howen, Secretary General of the International Commission of

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Jurists); and Mr. Amir Dossal, Executive Director of the UN Fund for International Partnerships.

¶ 8. (SBU) There is no requirement that the Chair of the Board be one of the three members appointed by the Secretary General. However, the past Chair and Acting Chair have been from among this group. The U.S. recognizes it is preferable to have a non-UN Member State as Chair to avoid political pressure on the Member State in its capacity as Board Chair.

¶ 9. (SBU) Department is considering possible alternatives to Aye Aye Thant and will get back to the Mission with more details as soon as possible in Septel.

¶ 10. (U) Department appreciates the Mission's assistance with this request.

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